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Asked To 'Dream,' Students Beat the Odds

From One 6th-Grade Class
A National Movement Was Born

By Meg Sommerfeld

NEW YORK CITY—In March 1985, a 15-year-old named David Nieves wrote:

"A man has just knocked on my door. When I go to open it he is standing there holding a key. He tell me that life has been good to him and it's time to share that good with others. He hands me the key and says, 'With this key, you must pick a door and open it so that your life can be as good as successful as mine was and is for me.'"

"Then he start to tell me what's beyond the doors. He says, 'Behind those doors there are academic subjects; Remember you must pick one, that one is your future so study it well.' Then I start to think to myself, 'Why is he giving me this?' It was like he read my mind and answered my questions and prayers and said, 'You are the future and you must do what's right for you and the world.' 'Happy birthday, Gene.'"

The recipient of this greeting was Eugene M. Lang, a multimillionaire New York City businessman who four years earlier had



Eugene M. Lang, left, talks with Denise Richardson and David Nieves, two of the original "dreamers" from P.S. 121.

made a spontaneous promise to David and his 60 classmates at Public School 121. As the speaker at their 6th-grade graduation from his alma mater in Spanish Harlem, Mr. Lang suddenly voiced an impromptu pledge: If they completed high school, he would guarantee them the financial means to attend college.

Though study after study has painted a bleak picture of the

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High Court Eases Federal Guidelines For Desegregation

8-to-0 Ruling Reverses
Decision in DeKalb Case

By Mark Walsh

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Supreme Court last week made it easier for school districts to be relieved from some federal court supervision of their desegregation programs, even when they have not implemented all aspects of their programs or when racial imbalances persist because of population shifts beyond their control.

Ruling in a closely watched case from DeKalb County, Ga., the High Court held 8 to

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0 that federal judges may relinquish control of desegregation plans in stages, such as by ending supervision of student assignments while maintaining oversight of faculty allocation or other factors.

In addition, a brittle coalition of five justices held that school systems once segregated by law need not remedy racial imbalances caused by demographic shifts and other factors not under their control.

"Racial balance is not to be achieved for its own sake," wrote Associate Justice Anthony M. Kennedy for the majority in *Freeman v. Pitts* (Case No. 89-1290). "Residential housing choices, and their attendant effects on the racial composition of schools, present an ever-changing pattern, one difficult to address through judicial remedies."

The Court's March 31 decision reversed a federal appellate court's ruling that in order to win freedom from court control, the suburban Atlanta school system must maintain racial parity for several years simultaneously in six categories—student assignment, faculty, staff, transportation, physical facilities, and extracurricular activities.

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Academy Panel Urges Wide-Ranging Effort To 'Rebuild' O.E.R.I.

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—Concluding that the Education Department's research arm has been rendered ineffective by underfunding and organizational weakness, a National Academy of Sciences panel last week issued a sweeping blueprint to "rebuild" the office of educational research and improvement.

In a report issued here that is expected to provide a strong boost to legislation currently moving through the Congress, the panel called for creating a policymaking board to oversee the agency, reconfiguring the O.E.R.I.'s research functions into "directorates" that would focus on particular problem areas, and forming a new, separate directorate that would assist state and local reform efforts.

The panel also urged a massive increase in funding for the agency—an additional \$267 million a year, nearly five times what the O.E.R.I. currently spends on educational research.

If the Congress fails to provide such an increase, the report warns, "the agency's mission and responsibilities should be dramatically narrowed."

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Redefine Role, Duties of School Boards To Focus on Policy, Report Advocates

By Lynn Olson

Local school boards should be reconstituted to focus more on education policy and less on the "micromanagement" of their districts, a widely anticipated report released last week argues.

The report concludes that many school boards have been obstacles to—rather than forces for—fundamental change in education: a problem that it attributes primarily to their tendency to become "immersed in the day-to-day administration" of schools.

"While a separate local school-governance body may well be the right choice," it continues, "the role and responsibilities of such a body should be thoroughly redefined."

The report, by a 19-member task force of educators, journalists, and businesspeople, was sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund and the Danforth Foundation, two private philanthropies.

Officials of the National School Boards Association last week challenged the task force's conclusions, arguing that many school boards already fulfill their policymaking function.

The idea that any "radical redefinition" of school boards is needed "incorrectly assumes that the governance of 15,350 local public-school districts across the United States . . . is monolithic," said Arlene R. Penfield, the president of the N.S.B.A.

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Parent Discontent Fuels Spirited School-Board Races in Princeton

By Debra Viadero

PRINCETON, N.J.—Caroline Angrisani can recall a time in this small university town when school-board elections generated barely a ripple of interest.

"I remember it being almost a joke," said Ms. Angrisani, a mother and volunteer in the local schools. "People would say, 'Oh, you're voting in elections for the school board and budget. What a waste of time!'"

But that is not the case anymore.

This week, eight candidates are competing for just three slots on the local school board, a larger field than most residents can remember. And many of the candidates are being backed by newly active parent groups that have strong—and substantive—criticisms of their children's schooling.

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Carol B. Choye has been superintendent of the Princeton district for six years.

Also in the news

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A New Battle

A California teacher who refused to fight in the Persian Gulf war faces possible revocation of his license.

IN SUMMARY

Chicago Plan Rejected

Chicago's school board is under fire again by an oversight panel that has rejected the board's plan for decentralizing the school bureaucracy.

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Bias in Teacher Contract?

Black community leaders in Toledo are charging that a new teachers' contract contains hiring provisions that discriminate against blacks and other minorities.

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The True Cost of Drugs

Drug and alcohol dependency are contributing to increases in domestic violence, child abuse, and the placement of children in foster care, a report concludes.

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Lead Study Questioned

A prominent researcher whose work has led to tougher federal standards on acceptable childhood lead exposure is being investigated for alleged irregularities in his data.

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A Cheery Conclusion

Just one day into the new fiscal year, the New York legislature approved a budget that is earning cheers from education advocates pleased at a year without cuts.

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Deciding on Dollars

The Education Department's decision whether to use 1980 or 1990 Census data will affect the disposition of billions of federal education dollars.

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CONVENTIONS IN PRINT

A special pullout guide to the annual convention of the National School Boards Association.

Begins opposite Page 18.

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ACROSS THE NATION

NATIONAL

New Gun-Violence Curriculum Adopted in 5 Major Districts

A national gun violence-prevention organization last week introduced a new curriculum for grades pre-K through 12 and announced its implementation in five major school districts.

New York City, Los Angeles, Oakland, Calif., San Diego, and Dade County, Fla., have agreed to use the "Straight Talk About Risks," or STAR, curriculum beginning this spring.

Written by the Washington-based Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, a national education and lobbying group, STAR is a revised version of an earlier curriculum called "Kids + Guns: A Deadly Equation." That program was piloted starting in 1989 in Dade County, the nation's fourth-largest school district.

The STAR curriculum is designed to teach students decisionmaking, conflict-management, and other skills to help them react properly if they encounter a gun, to resist peer pressure, and to distinguish between real violence and that portrayed on television.

The curriculum also provides basic safety

information for parents to help them keep guns away from children and offers a 15-minute video featuring teenage victims of gun violence.

In New York, 26 middle schools began using the curriculum last month. It is expected to be in all public schools there by the fall of 1993, school officials said.

■ **The National Center for Outcome Based Education has launched a two-year program under which eight school districts will restructure themselves to improve the overall quality of the education they provide.**

The center, a nonprofit group that works with districts to improve student learning results, announced its Quality District Project late last month.

The eight districts involved are: the Alma (Mich.) Public Schools; the Bremerton (Wash.) School District 100-C; the Sweetwater County School District No. 2 in Green River, Wyo.; the La Joya (Tex.) Independent School District; the Pasco (Wash.) School District No. 1; the Richfield (Minn.) Public School District; the Wickenburg (Ariz.) Unified School District No. 9; and the Windermere School District No. 4 in Invermere, British Columbia, Canada.

The program is based on the Quality District Paradigm, developed by John R.

Champlin, the center's executive director. The center will provide training, assistance in identifying weaknesses and solutions, and support in creating plans to restructure each district. Center officials said they hope the program provides a national model for school-district restructuring.

Independent evaluators will assess the effort, center officials said.

■ **The United States is lagging in preventing infant mortality and other infant- and child-health problems, a new report concludes.**

The report, issued last month by the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality, says that babies are more likely to die young in the United States than in 21 other industrialized nations.

Although the U.S. infant-mortality rate is improving, the rate in other countries is improving at a faster pace, the report concludes. In 1989, the most recent year for which final data are available, 9.8 babies per 1,000 live births in the United States died before their first birthday. The infant-mortality rate is 50 percent lower in Japan, which has the best rate in the world.

The report also found that the percentage of low-birthweight babies has continued to increase, and that fewer women are getting adequate prenatal care.

STATES

Vermont Officials Searching for Missing Federal Job-Training Funds

Officials of the Vermont Department of Education have announced an independent audit of the department following the discovery that between \$300,000 and \$400,000 in federal funds is missing.

The department has been unable to account for the whereabouts of the money, given to the state by the U.S. Labor Department's employment and training office to finance a variety of job-training programs for youths.

It remains unclear whether the money has been spent or if it is buried somewhere

in an obscure account. Embezzlement also remains a possibility, although Richard Mills, the state's commissioner of education, said that was an unlikely explanation.

The issue originally came to Mr. Mills' attention last December, when the state's commissioner of employment and training alerted him to a \$10,000 overexpenditure in a summer youth-jobs program.

Mr. Mills then instructed the education department's chief financial officer, Peter Ryan, to investigate the matter. Mr. Ryan found the fiscal discrepancies to be far greater than initially thought.

Mr. Mills said the department was already engaged in a review of its fiscal-management practices in an effort "do everything we can to anticipate the kinds of problems we're going to see spelled out in

the audit report" and begin solving them.

■ **The New York State Board of Regents has adopted regulations mandating the method by which school districts in the state will include parents and teachers in their site-based-management efforts.**

The regents voted to require every district in the state to develop and adopt a plan to give parents and teachers a key role in school-based planning and shared decision-making.

Under the regulations, districts have until Feb. 1, 1994, to submit a plan to the state education commissioner for approval. Each district must establish a districtwide committee—composed of the superintendent of schools, administrators and teachers selected by their unions, and parents chosen by

Look, Up in the Air . . .

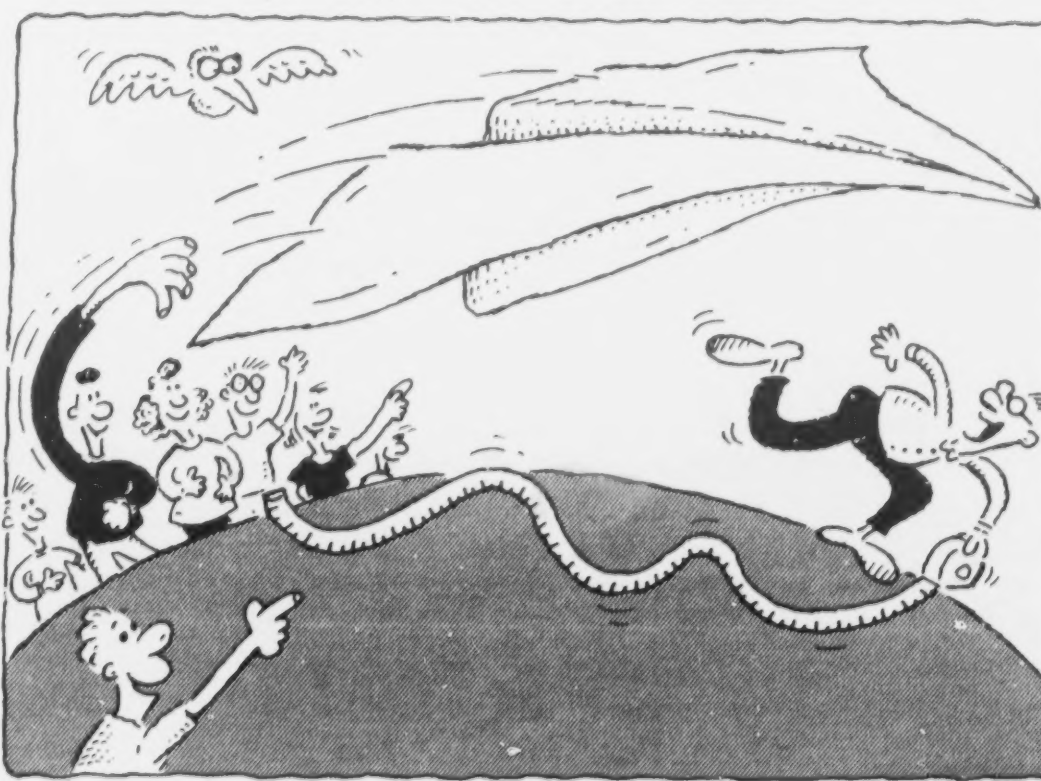
Most students who spend time chucking paper airplanes at each other in classrooms probably would never think of trying to build the world's largest such craft. But that's exactly what some Virginia students had in mind when they created the largest flyable paper plane on record, the "White Pelican."

Now they're asking the folks who publish the *Guinness Book of World Records* to make it official.

This bird of a different feather was the result of a program sponsored by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics to promote technology in schools.

During the months-long project, students from Bethel, Hampton, Kecoughtan, and Phoebus high schools in southeastern Virginia combined brainpower and elbow grease with A.I.A.A. members, including some very aerodynamically inclined former engineers of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

As part of their effort, the students were invited to the NASA visitors' center in Langley, Va., where they experimented with



computer simulators and wind tunnels, and soared in gliders to better understand the principles involved in unassisted flight.

Armed only with paper, glue, and tape, students at each school created models whose best features were combined in the final product, a paper pelican with a wingspan of 30 feet, 6 inches, and weighing less than 8 pounds.

During last month's maiden flight at the NASA hangar in Langley, the White Pelican set a new world record for paper-airplane flight: 114 feet, 9 inches. The previous record

was 85.4 feet, set by students in Indiana.

The record-breaking bird now holds a roost of honor at the new Virginia Air and Space museum in Hampton.

Most students "It was great seeing the students and engineers work as a team," says Ferdinand Grosveld, the A.I.A.A. project coordinator for the Hampton area. Next year, he says, students may attempt to design the world's largest radio-controlled airplane.

—S.K.G.



Photos by Yael Routenberg

Debbie Rummel, left, leads her Physical Management class in a session of step aerobics at Antioch (Ill.) Community High School. "I didn't like myself," says Beth Chans, above, a junior who lost 30 pounds in a year and a half in the class. "I didn't look pretty, and I didn't feel pretty."

a day, and nearly 40 percent said they ate fried foods four or more times a week.

The average teenager's dependence on fast food is clearly evident at Antioch. Just steps beyond the front door of the school lies what is known locally as "Fast-Food Hell," a strip that includes virtually every hamburger, fried-chicken, and pizza chain advertised on television. Inside the school, the food situation is not much better; students can buy entrees at the cafeteria that include side orders of french fries, or purchase their lunch in a student hangout that includes a wall of junk-food-laden vending machines.

In this environment, Ms. Rummel tries to persuade her Physical Management students to adopt healthier habits. While some students learn about the physical-education elective through friends, most are recruited by Ms. Rummel, who scans the results of annual skinfold measurements

taken of all of the school's students for potential enrollees. Students are eligible for the class if their body-fat ratio exceeds 30 percent if they are girls and 25 percent if they are boys.

'Change My Ways'

The class, Ms. Rummel says, has four major components: affecting positive behavior changes, such as eating more slowly; physical conditioning through aerobic exercise; maintaining a low-fat, high-fiber, and high-carbohydrate diet developed by the American Diabetes Association; and developing a positive self-image.

"A lot of kids eat because they have a lot of problems," she says. "Food is just a symptom."

Although students last year lost, on average, 18 pounds and 5 percent of their body fat, Ms. Rummel says the program is no magic bullet. "I tell kids that this is like

any other diet program," she says. "Unless you want it, it won't happen."

Besides improving students' physical skills, the class provides tips for dealing with the real world. Ms. Rummel talks with her students about the best things to eat in a fast-food restaurant, and has taken them to the mall to learn how to select clothes that flatter their figures.

Students say that Ms. Rummel's interest in their health, as well as the class's content, has helped them lose weight and feel better about themselves.

Beth Chans, a junior who took the class for a year and a half, says she has been able to keep off 24 of the 30 pounds she has shed.

"My mom is really overweight," she explains. "I don't want to be that way. I had to change my ways."

"I really wanted to lose weight," she says. "I didn't like myself. I didn't look pretty, and I didn't feel pretty."

Jayne Lenhart, a sophomore, says students in the Physical Management class are supportive of each other. In regular gym classes, she says, "people would be rude to you. They would start making moo sounds."

But in Ms. Rummel's class, she says, "everyone in the class is at the same level. They understand."

Trish Jelinek, a senior, says Ms. Rummel asked her to join the class after she was hospitalized for an eating disorder.

Although students have occasionally commented about her weight and the fact that she is enrolled in a class for overweight students, Trish says that most of her peers have been supportive. "People who know I am in the class give me a lot of credit for doing something," she says.

"Sometimes I come into class feeling like crap," she says after a brisk session of step aerobics. "After a good workout, I feel better about myself."

Q. These are, are they not, reactions that many children would exhibit?

A. Oh, sure. There're two kinds of fearful children. One kind acquired it with no special temperament as a result of having stress in their early years—[parents'] marital quarreling, abuse, neglect.

Then there's this group. And they look the same. . . . To a teacher they would appear to be the same. But they're different.

Q. The two children are different because . . .

A. They are different physiologically. The child who acquired it has the normal physiology of most children. Inhibited children have a very excitable sympathetic nervous system [the nerve cells along the spinal column that control the heart, stomach, etc].

Q. These are the kids that tend to sit on the sidelines?

A. Often they're very smart. They don't like groups, so often if they come from middle-class homes they get the best grades in the class. They become poets and scientists and computer program-

mers. They pick vocations, if they're smart, that allow them to work alone and not with other people. . . .

If they are academically competent, they're lives are fine.

Q. And if they're not?

A. If they're not academically competent, and they live in lower-class neighborhoods, then they are in trouble. Because they can't use academic work as a compensation. And lower-class peer groups tend to value outgoingness, so these are the kids who are usually very anxious.

Q. For people interacting with very shy children, be they teachers, parents, what is the best way to handle them?

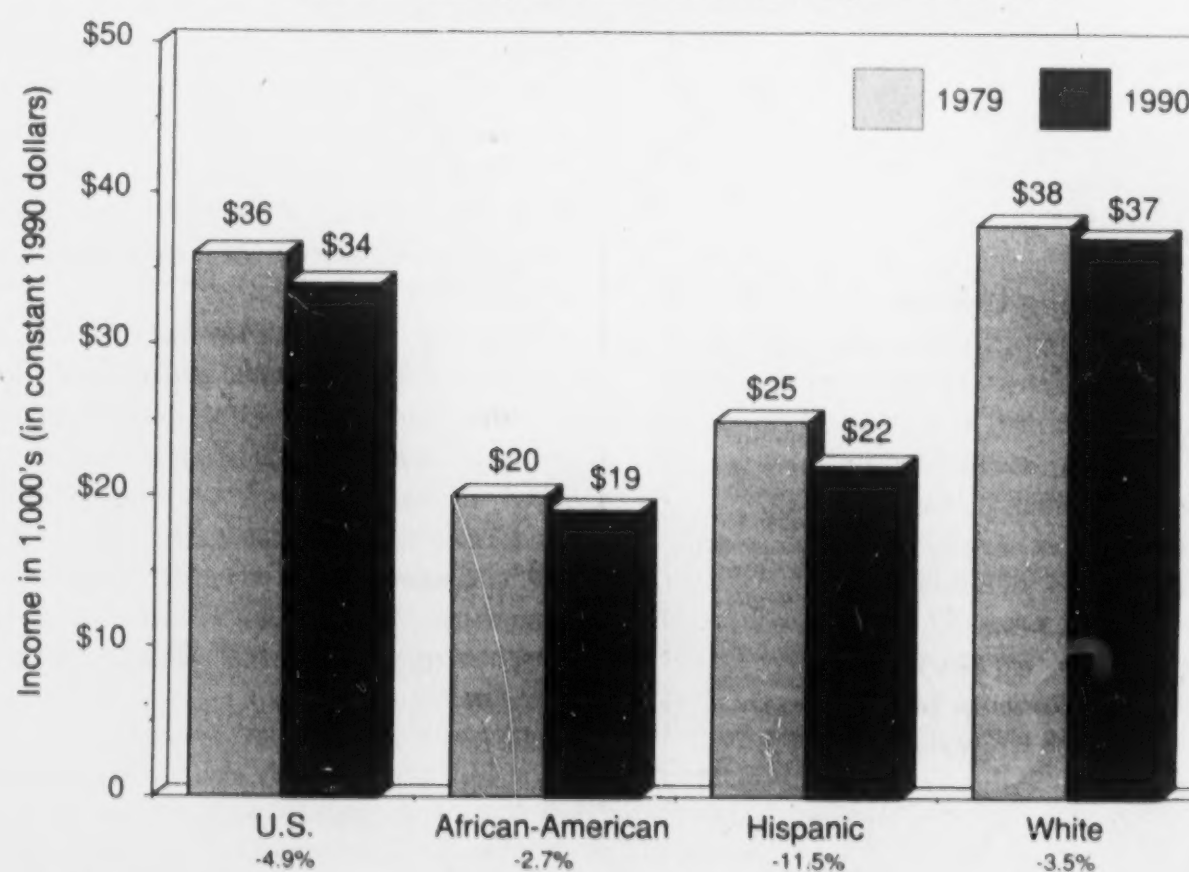
A. If you're sure you have one of these kids, you don't want to press them too hard.

These children are isolates in the classroom, and some teachers feel, well, that's very bad for a child to be an isolate, and they force them too hard. So you have to be sensitive. You don't want to put too much pressure on such children to join the group and be sociable.

DIMENSIONS

Declining Family Income

Difference in Median Income of Families with Children, by Race and Ethnicity: 1979-90



SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Center for the Study of Social Policy